

we haven't gotten one from anybody else. But keep in mind, this modified plan makes more sense. I think it would please everybody, and it is a heck of a lot cheaper.

If my colleague from Oklahoma has something he would like to suggest we include—I am not chairman of the committee, I am not on the committee, but I am saying, this was not designed in perfection, but I think it is a positive move that deals with the realities of a pitiful situation.

I talked with the mayor of Gulfport, MS, recently, Mayor Brent Warr, and he told me a story that breaks your heart. He picked up on the streets of Gulfport, MS, one of the former residents who was walking along the side of the road after he had made his way from Washington, DC, to Gulfport. He got tired of waiting. He went home—this is his home—to a mold-infested, mildewed, improperly air-conditioned facility.

I don't think we should do this to these retirees and these veterans. I think we need to move ahead and do the right thing to get our veterans home to Gulfport. I will be glad to yield to my colleague from Oklahoma if he has some additional suggestions. I know this is an area about which he cares.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I want to see this facility replaced, too, but I have some serious questions. The Senator was not here for the debate. I want him to hear those questions because what he is proposing is cheaper than several of what the retirement board suggested. I agree. Call me cheap. What he is proposing is \$370,000 per resident. That is twice what I can build a brand-new hospital for with the latest everything.

I guess my point is, for \$221 million, what are our grandchildren going to get because we are doing this under an emergency, and we know we can build a brand-new facility up to code, nice as can be, with the rooms the size the Senator wants, for \$150 million total. We know that is possible. So why should we spend \$221 million doing it? If it is not a fixed plan now; if we send \$221 million out of here, they are going to spend it.

My problem is, I would love for the Senator and maybe the chairman to work with me to get this to a more realistic idea of what the real costs should be so that we accomplish the goal they want, and we do it in a more timely manner. I agree, having a campus style is probably a little bit more expensive, but it isn't 50 percent more expensive than what it should cost.

I made the point earlier that for a new home, for a single or couple living in 1,200 to 1,500 square feet in the State of Mississippi, you can buy one of the nicest places in the world for \$81,000 right now, or \$72,000. We got a quote yesterday from Mississippi. So that leaves \$300,000. If we bought them all a brand-new home and then hired them a caretaker at \$30,000 a year for the next 10 years, we would spend less money.

Again, you bet, I am a tightwad when it comes to our grandchildren's money, and I want value for what we spend. That is the purpose of this amendment. I am willing to withdraw this amendment if I can have the assurance that we can moderate this back into a range that would look like something comparable to what we really need to spend.

I wish to make a final point, if the Senator will bear with me. We don't have this money. We don't have it. Anything we don't get good value for today because our kids are paying for it means they are going to get an exaggerated cost when they come to pay it back. That is my purpose.

I want them to have a great home. I want them to be able to come home. I know they have a tremendous camaraderie living there. I want to see that restored for them. They deserve it. Can we not do it in a much cheaper way and still give them what they want? Remember, they fought hard so we would have the money to be able to do it.

Mr. LOTT. If the Senator will yield, Mr. President, taking my time back, look, I on occasion have thought of myself as a cheap hawk, too. When you see what I have seen—and the President of the United States and Senator after Senator and Congressman after Congressman looked these people in the eye and said: We are going to make you whole; we are not going to give you everything you want, but we are going to help you get back on your feet. And we said that to these old veterans, too.

I don't want to build a Taj Mahal. Unfortunately, quite often that is what we get when the Government does it. I would like to do it for less. I would like to have more for less. I would prefer the Pentagon had developed a plan 4 months ago and said let's do this. But here we sit on the sideline.

I can't speak for the chairman of the committee, but the Senator can see this is something I have paid attention to. It is something I care about. But I would be open to suggestions and working with the Senator to see if we can come up with a plan that the Pentagon, hopefully, would help us with that would do more and maybe do less. I am amenable to that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Senator, my colleague from Mississippi, for his contribution to this discussion. I think he made a very compelling argument for the fact that we need to provide funds in this bill with direction to proceed to work on a new facility for these veterans. That is the point. That is why included in this bill is a committee recommendation of \$176 million.

The language specifically suggests that this be used to construct a new, multibuilding, campus-style facility on the site occupied by the former Armed Forces Retirement Home in Gulfport,

MS. I think that is the key, and that was brought out by my good friend and colleague from Mississippi. That is the point.

It is the sense of our committee and those familiar with this facility that it should remain in the Gulfport, MS, area. The mayor of Gulfport came up to see me to talk about his concerns, his interests, and his ideas. I know he talked with Senator LOTT and probably other members of our delegation. I want to help him achieve his goal for having the facility rebuilt, using the best measures that we can to be sure we get a good result for the dollars that we invest, and we don't waste money. We don't want to do that. We don't want to just throw a lot of money out there and let the home spend it without any guidance or restraint.

I am very committed, though, to the notion that we ought to have a provision with some money and these directions in the bill. I don't think the House has included anything like this. We are going to have to negotiate with the House when we get to conference. I don't know what their ideas would be, but I want to be able to have at least the commitment of the Senate behind our effort to do what is said in this report.

It could be \$176 million. If the Senator wants to change it to \$166 million or \$120 million—I don't know what the right number is. But it shows a commitment to proceed with funds available to hire some people to get the work done. This is what Senator LOTT's point is. Nothing has been done. We have to get somebody moving, get an architect selected, come together with a plan, and then we will see whether we can fund it. But at least we have enough money in here to show we are serious about rebuilding it, that we are making this investment, and we will monitor the use of the money and try our best to be sure that every dollar is well spent. That is my goal.

The Armed Services Committee has oversight responsibility. That is the legislative committee. So they can help monitor and follow the progress as well. But I hope we won't strike the money and just say this is a bad idea and we are not going to do anything else. That is unacceptable. That is totally unacceptable.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I concur with the Senator's desire to reestablish the site there. That is not what this is about. I am told the Senate Armed Services Committee is not for this because it only gets us halfway there, which bothers me greatly because instead of \$221 million, we are going to spend \$442 million, which ends up being about \$800,000 per bed.

The point I make is this: If you throw money out there, they are going to build where they expend the money. How about us having a plan within a certain amount of money and living with it, rather than saying we are